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## Far-right using COVID-19 theories to grow reach, study shows

Associated Press

**PARIS (AP)** — The mugshot-style photos are posted on online message boards in black and white and look a little like old-fashioned "wanted" posters.

"The Jews own COVID just like all of Hollywood," the accompanying text says. "Wake up people."

The post is one of many that white supremacists and far-right extremists are using to expand their reach and recruit followers on the social media platform Telegram, according to the findings of researchers who sifted through nearly half a million comments on pages — called channels on Telegram — that they categorized as far-right from January 2020 to June 2021. The tactic has been successful: Nine of the 10 most

viewed posts in the sample examined by the researchers contained misleading claims about the safety of vaccines or the pharmaceutical companies manufacturing them. One Telegram channel saw its total subscribers jump tenfold after it leaned into COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

"COVID-19 has served as a catalyst for radicalization," said the study's author, Ciaran O'Connor, an analyst at the London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue. "It allows conspiracy theorists or extremists to create simple narratives, framing it as us versus them, good versus evil."

Other posts downplayed the severity of the coronavirus or pushed conspiracy theories about its origins.

Continued on next page



Protestors light flares during a demonstration against measures to battle the coronavirus pandemic in Vienna, Austria, on Dec. 11, 2021.

Associated Press

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**Continued from Front**

Many of the posts contain hate speech directed at Jews, Asians, women or other groups or violent rhetoric that would be automatically removed from Facebook or Twitter for violating the standards of those sites.

Telegram, based in the United Arab Emirates, has many different kinds of users around the world, but it has become a favorite tool of some on the far-right in part because the platform lacks the content moderation of Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. In a statement to The Associated Press, Telegram said it welcomed "the peaceful expression of ideas, including those we do not agree with." The statement said moderators monitor activity and user reports "in order to remove public calls for violence."

O'Connor said he believes the people behind these posts are trying to exploit fear and anxiety over COVID-19 to attract new recruits, whose loyalty may outlast the pandemic.

Indeed, mixed in with the COVID-19 conspiracy posts are some direct recruitment pitches. For example, someone posted a link to a news story about a Long Island, New York, synagogue on a channel popular with the far-right Proud Boys and added a message urging followers to join them. "Embrace who you were called to be," read the post, which was accompanied by a swastika.

The researchers found suggestions that far-right groups on Telegram are working together. ISD researchers linked two usernames involved in running one Telegram channel to two prominent members of the American far-right. One was a scheduled speaker at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlotte,



**Anti-vaccine mandate protesters hold signs outside the front doors of the Los Angeles Unified School District, LAUSD headquarters in Los Angeles, on Sept. 9, 2021.**

**Associated Press**

tesville, Virginia, where a white supremacist deliberately drove into a crowd of counterdemonstrators, killing one and injuring 35. That channel has grown steadily since the pandemic began and now has a reach of around 400,000 views each day, according to Telegram Analytics, a service that keeps statistical data on about 150,000 Telegram channels on the site TGStat. In May 2020 the channel had 5,000 subscribers; it now has 50,000. The data is especially concerning given a rash of incidents around the world that indicate some extremists are moving from online rhetoric to offline action. Gavin Yamey, a physician and public health professor at Duke University, has written about the rise of threats against health care work-

ers during the pandemic. He said the harassment is even worse for those who are women, people of color, in a religious minority or LGBTQ. Yamey, who is Jewish, has received threats and anti-Semitic messages, including one on Twitter calling for his family to be "executed." He fears racist conspiracy theories and scapegoating may persist even after the pandemic eases. "I worry that in some ways the genie is out of the bottle," Yamey said. The pandemic and the unrest it has caused have been linked to a wave of harassment and attacks on Asian-Americans. In Italy, a far-right opponents of vaccine mandates rampaged through a union headquarters and a hospital. In August in Hawaii, some of

those who harassed that state's Jewish lieutenant governor at his home during a vaccine protest brandished fliers with his photo and the word "Jew." Elsewhere, people have died after taking sham cures, pharmacists have destroyed vaccine vials, and others have damaged 5G telecommunication towers since the pandemic began nearly two years ago. Events such as the pandemic leave many people feeling anxious and looking for explanations, according to Cynthia Miller-Idriss, director of the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab at American University, which studies far-right extremism. Conspiracy theories can provide an artificial sense of control, she said.

"COVID-19 has created fertile ground for recruitment because so many people around the world feel unsettled," Miller-Idriss said. "These racist conspiracy theories give people a sense of control, a sense of power over events that make people feel powerless."

Policing extremism online has challenged tech companies that say they must balance protecting free speech with removing hate speech. They also must contend with increasingly sophisticated tactics by groups that have learned to evade platform rules. Facebook this month announced that it had removed a network of accounts based in Italy and France that had spread conspiracy theories about vaccines and carried out coordinated harassment campaigns against journalists, doctors and public health officials. The network, called V\_V, used both real and fake accounts and was overseen by a group of users who coordinated their activities on Telegram in an effort to hide their tracks from Facebook, company investigators found.

"They sought to mass-harass individuals with pro-vaccination views into making their posts private or deleting them, essentially suppressing their voices," said Mike Dvilyanski, head of cyber espionage investigations at Meta, Facebook's parent company.

O'Connor, the ISD researcher, said sites like Telegram will continue to serve as a refuge for extremists as long as they lack the moderation policies of the larger platforms.

"The guardrails that you see on other platforms, they don't exist on Telegram," O'Connor said. "That makes it a very attractive place for extremists." □



# TikTok posts referencing violence raise anxiety at schools

By KANTELE FRANKO and MATT O'BRIEN

**COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)** — Some parents kept their children home, police stepped up patrols and educators tightened security protocols Friday in response to viral TikTok posts alluding to unconfirmed threats of violence that raised anxiety levels at schools nationwide.

Vickie Cartwright, the interim superintendent of schools in Broward County, Florida, one of the nation's largest school districts, said the U.S. government should take action if TikTok won't get rid of dangerous posts that hurt American schools. "I'm asking for our federal government at this point in time to intervene. We need help. I cannot fathom that any other country would allow this type of attack to be occurring on their education system," she said.

With stress levels already soaring from the effects of the pandemic and a rash of hoax threats following a deadly school shooting in Michigan on Nov. 30, districts said they were taking precautions out of an abundance of caution.



Handwritten messages are left at the memorial site at the memorial site on Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021, outside Oxford High School in Oxford, Mich., after a 15-year-old allegedly killed these four classmates, and injured seven others in a shooting inside the northern Oakland County school one week earlier.

The posts circulating online said schools would face shooting and bomb threats Friday. In a tweet, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said it did not "have any information indicating any specific, credible threats to schools but

recommends communities remain alert."

Some districts opted to cancel classes for the day or limit where students could go inside school buildings. Many others increased security staffing. More than a half dozen school districts

in the Houston area told middle and high school students to leave their backpacks at home Friday in response to the TikTok posts, though none of the districts had received credible threats, officials said. TikTok has been deleting

posts spreading "misinformation that is generally sparking alarming warnings" but is not finding posts that are promoting violence or making threats, company spokesperson Hillary McQuaide said.

"We are removing the alarmist warnings," she said. "Those are misinformation." McQuaide said the company began hearing the rumors late Wednesday and has been working with law enforcement agencies to try to get to the bottom of them.

The post most widely associated with Friday's fears is "not really a threat, it's just saying they are hearing this thing is happening," said Justin Patchin, a criminal justice professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center.

How to respond to that presents a dilemma both to TikTok and educators, especially since many of the previous panics about TikTok challenges have proven to be bogus and acknowledging them can make them more influential. □

Associated Press

# California pot companies warn of impending industry collapse

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD  
Associated Press

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Leading California cannabis companies warned Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday that the state's legal industry was on the verge of collapse and needed immediate tax cuts and a rapid expansion of retail outlets to steady the shaky marketplace.

The letter signed by more than two dozen executives, industry officials and legalization advocates followed years of complaints that the heavily taxed and regulated industry was unable to compete with the widespread illegal economy, where consumer prices are far lower and sales are double or triple the legal business.

Four years after broad legal sales began, "our industry is collapsing," said the let-

ter, which also was sent to legislative leaders in Sacramento.

The industry leaders asked for an immediate lifting of the cultivation tax placed on growers, a three-year holiday from the excise tax and an expansion of retail shops throughout much of the state. It's estimated that about two-thirds of California cities remain without dispensaries, since it's up to local governments to authorize sales and production.

The current system "is rigged for all to fail," they wrote.

"The opportunity to create a robust legal market has been squandered as a result of excessive taxation," the letter said. "Seventy-five percent of cannabis in California is consumed in the illicit market and is untested and unsafe."

"We need you to under-

stand that we have been pushed to a breaking point," they told the governor.

Newsom spokeswoman Erin Mellon said in a statement that the governor supports cannabis tax reform and recognizes the system needs change, while expanding enforcement against illegal sales and production.

"It's clear that the current tax construct is presenting unintended but serious challenges. Any tax-reform effort in this space will require action from two-thirds of the Legislature and the Governor is open to working with them on a solution," Mellon said.

Companies, executives and groups signing the letter included the California Cannabis Industry Association, the California arm of the National Organization



In this Jan. 12, 2018, file photo, a bud tender prepares marijuana for a customer at Med Men a dispensary in West Hollywood, Calif.

Associated Press

for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, the Los Angeles-based United Cannabis Business Association, Flow Kana Inc., Harborside Inc., and CannaCraft.

In a conference call with reporters, Darren Story of Strong Agronomy said tough market conditions

forced him to cut loose more than half his staff. He said taxes that will increase next year make it an easy choice for shoppers. With prices in the underground half of what they see on legal shelves, he said "most consumers are going to take off." □



# Harvard drops standardized test requirement through 2026

By **COLLIN BINKLEY**  
AP Education Writer

Students will be able to apply to Harvard University without submitting SAT or ACT scores for at least the next four years, the Ivy League school announced Thursday, extending a policy many colleges have adopted during the pandemic and that a growing number are keeping for years to come.

Harvard announced in 2020 that standardized tests would be optional for a year as students faced limited access to testing sites. It later extended the policy for another year, and this week said tests won't be required through 2026 amid continued challenges.

William Fitzsimmons, the school's dean of admissions, said students who do not submit test scores will not face any disadvantage in the application process. "Their applications will be considered on the basis of what they have presented, and they are encouraged to send whatever materials they believe would convey their accomplishments in secondary school and their



People walk through the gates leading to Harvard Yard, Dec. 13, 2018, at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

promise for the future," he said in a statement. Harvard joins a growing number of colleges moving to extend the policy. The University of Wisconsin announced last week that test scores will remain optional through the spring 2025 semester. Last month, Stanford University extended its policy through the 2022-23 school year. Miami

University in Ohio recently extended a policy through spring 2023. Some other colleges say they are permanently moving away from standardized tests amid criticism that the exams favor wealthy, white applicants and disadvantage minority and low-income students. The University of Kansas on Wednesday created a

pathway to admit students without taking exams as long as they have a high school grade point average of 3.25 or better. In announcing the change, Chancellor Douglas Girod said the policy was initially spurred by the pandemic but that "people were figuring out quickly that these tests were creating barriers."

Associated Press

The University of California system became the largest higher education institute in the U.S. to abandon test scores this year as part of a court settlement. Facing a lawsuit from students and groups who said the SAT and ACT are biased against students of color, the system opted to stop considering test scores entirely.

The organizations behind the SAT and ACT have denied allegations that their tests are biased.

In January, the governing board of the 480,000-student California State University system plans to consider a proposal to make test scores optional after a state board recommended it. On Wednesday, the system's chancellor told The Los Angeles Times he would support the move.

The pandemic has accelerated the number of colleges moving to make tests optional — at least on a temporary basis — but even before COVID-19, more were moving in that direction amid concerns about equity and access to college. □

# Crews may have found 1887 time capsule in Lee statue base



A time capsule that was placed in 1887 in the pedestal that once held the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee is uncovered on Monument Avenue, Friday Dec. 17, 2021, in Richmond, Va.

Associated Press

By **DENISE LAVOIE**  
RICHMOND, Va. (AP) —

Crews working to remove the pedestal where a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee towered over Richmond for more than a century believe they've found a time capsule that was buried there in 1887.

The massive bronze equestrian statue of Lee, erected in 1890, was taken down in September, more than a year after Gov. Ralph Northam ordered its removal after protests over racism and police brutality erupted across the country — including in Richmond — fol-

lowing the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The day after the statue was removed, work crews spent more than 12 hours searching for the time capsule in the 40-foot (12-meter) tall pedestal, but were unable to locate it.

On Friday, Northam announced that crews found the top of a square box embedded in a 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) granite block. It was located approximately 20 feet (6 meters) off the ground in the main section of the pedestal, not in its base. Workers who searched for it in September believed it was tucked inside or under a cornerstone of the pedestal.

Northam said in a news release that the stone must be removed and lowered to the ground before historic preservation teams are able to confirm whether it is

the time capsule. "It looks like it is (the time capsule)," said Clark Mercer, Northam's chief of staff. "We're hoping it hasn't been damaged by water over the last 100-plus years." A newspaper article from 1887 suggests the capsule contains Civil War memorabilia and a "picture of Lincoln lying in his coffin," although historians believe it's doubtful the picture is an actual photograph, which would be rare and valuable.

Records from the Library of Virginia suggest that 37 Richmond residents, organizations and businesses contributed about 60 objects to the capsule, many of which are believed to be related to the Confederacy.

If workers confirm the box is the time capsule, it will be transported to the state Department of Historic Re-

sources to be opened using best practices for historic preservation to maintain the integrity of the artifacts. The Lee statue, which became a symbol of racial injustice, was one of five Confederate tributes along Richmond's Monument Avenue and the only one that belonged to the state. The four city-owned statues were taken down in 2020, but the Lee statue removal was blocked by two lawsuits until a ruling from the Supreme Court of Virginia in September cleared the way for it to be taken down. Northam announced earlier this month that the enormous pedestal would be removed, a reversal from September, when the governor said the pedestal would stay in place so its future could be determined by a community-driven effort to reimagine Monument Avenue. □



# Despite Christmas truce, EU, UK still fight over Brexit deal

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — One year after the Brexit trade deal was supposed to end acrimony between the European Union and the departed United Kingdom, both sides showed Friday that theirs is still a relationship tainted by bad blood and accusations of bad faith.

They did postpone talks on their continued deep-seated differences into the New Year, a welcome respite since their trade negotiations last year slipped deep past countless deadlines and into Christmas Eve before an awkward compromise was found.

But on a day when the 27-nation bloc was counting on some positive feedback for what it saw as a breakthrough proposal to regulate medicine trade in Northern Ireland — which is part of the United Kingdom but also part of the EU's trading system — it got a lukewarm response.

Almost all other issues under discussion got a cold shoulder.

In a 13-point statement rife with complaints about perceived EU foot-dragging, ill will and sleight-of-hand in Northern Ireland, U.K. Brexit negotiator David Frost concluded: "It is disappointing that it has not been



Britain's chief Brexit negotiator David Frost gives a media statement at EU headquarters in Brussels Nov. 19, 2021.

Associated Press

possible to reach either a comprehensive or worthwhile interim agreement this year."

His EU counterpart, Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic shot back from the bloc's Brussels headquarters that "if the UK would reciprocate our efforts, our energy and our ambition we bring to these discussions we could be much more advanced by now."

Frost said that suspending parts of the Brexit agree-

ment under the so-called Art. 16 procedure was still very much on the cards.

"We remain ready to use the Article 16 safeguard mechanism if that is the only way to protect the prosperity and stability of Northern Ireland," he said. Experts say it would only be a small step from such a suspension to a full-blown trade war between the two sides.

Making matters worse Friday, French authorities announced they will seek EU

legal action against Britain over a months-long, unresolved fishing dispute. The decision came after French President Emmanuel Macron met with a delegation of French fishers.

That a tiny industry like fishing could claim such center stage in relations between the massive trade bloc and a historic ally only underscored the quick erosion of trust ever since Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016.

Often a reluctant partner,

even as an EU member, Britain finally agreed on a withdrawal deal, in which the compromise on Northern Ireland has proved unwieldy and impractical.

Northern Ireland is U.K. territory but effectively remained part of the EU's borderless trading market for goods when the U.K. left the bloc last year, causing practical problems for businesses and institutional wrangling over which side is in charge of what.

The U.K. also is insisting the EU cedes final legal oversight by its top court of any disputes on Northern Ireland trade, and instead makes them subject to independent arbitration — something the 27-nation bloc is flatly rejecting.

Governance in Northern Ireland, said Frost, "remains a fundamental issue of democratic accountability."

The EU complains that it was the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson that agreed to the specific deal it now objects to. Last year Britain pushed ahead with legislation that it admitted broke international law by overriding parts of the legally binding withdrawal agreement it signed with the EU. □

## France offering top defense technology for ties with India

By ASHOK SHARMA

Associated Press

**NEW DELHI (AP)** — India and France on Friday discussed future collaboration and co-production of defense equipment during a visit by the French defense minister, officials said.

Florence Parly and her Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh expressed their commitment to increase defense cooperation in all domains, India's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The statement gave no details, but Parly in an interview with The Times of India newspaper ahead of Friday's talks said she would reiterate France's commitment to offer the best of its defense technol-

ogy with a high "Make in India" component.

Parly also met with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and paid tribute to Indian soldiers at the National War Memorial.

France describes India as its "main partner" in the Indo-Pacific region shaken by concerns over the growing influence of China.

France expressed its resolve to expand strategic cooperation with India after it was angered by being left out of a nuclear submarine deal with Australia, which in September announced a new security alliance with Britain and the United States.

India has bought 36 Rafale fighter aircraft from France under a government con-

tract signed in September 2016. India may buy some more Rafale aircraft, apart from medium-range helicopters for its navy and upgraded French Mirage fighter aircraft and submarines, Indian media reports said.

India and France are increasingly engaged in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, counterterrorism, as well as discussions over climate change, renewable energy and sustainable growth and development, according to India's External Affairs Ministry.

France has emerged as a major source of foreign direct investment for India with more than 1,000 French companies already active in the coun-



India's defense minister Rajnath Singh, right, shakes hands with his French counterpart Florence Parly upon her arrival for a joint military guard of honour in New Delhi, India, Friday, Dec. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

try. France is the seventh-largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative FDI stock of \$9 billion from April

2000 to December 2020. There are more than 150 Indian companies operating in France. □



# Settlers attack Palestinian villages after West Bank killing

By JACK JEFFERY

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP)

— Jewish settlers burst into several villages in the occupied West Bank on Friday, smashing homes and cars and beating up at least two people, Palestinian officials said. The attacks came a day after Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli man in a shooting ambush in the territory.

The death of settler Yehuda Dimentman, killed when gunmen opened fire on his car near a West Bank settlement outpost late Thursday, threatened to ignite further violence between Palestinian residents and Israeli settlers. Two other passengers in Dimentman's vehicle were lightly wounded. Ghassan Daghlas, a Palestinian Authority official who monitors settlement activities, said groups of settlers entered several Palestinian villages near the northern city of Nablus early Friday, smashing up cars and homes. Two Palestinians required hospital treatment. In the Palestinian village of Qaryout, settlers broke into one house and tried



Israeli soldiers stand between Palestinians and a Jewish settler following a settler attack on the West Bank village of Burqa, Friday, Dec. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

to abduct a local resident, Wael Miqbel, according to Daghlas.

Photos later shared on social media showed Miqbel with bruises and swelling across his face, while other videos and photos published online showed confrontations between armed settlers and Palestinian residents.

Israeli leaders have vowed to find the assailants behind Thursday's shooting and the army deployed additional forces to the area. According to the official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, at least three men from the northern village of Burqa were arrested in overnight raids.

The army said Friday the

manhunt for the Palestinian gunmen was still ongoing, but gave no further details. Dimentman's car came under fire after leaving a Jewish seminary in the outpost of Homesh, a former settlement evacuated as part of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. In recent years, settlers have re-established an unauthorized

outpost at the site, one of dozens of outposts in the West Bank that are considered illegal but often tolerated by the Israeli government.

No group has claimed responsibility for the shooting, although the Hamas militant group, which rules the Gaza Strip, praised the attack.

Hundreds gathered for Dimentman's funeral services in Homesh on Friday morning, before the body was taken to Jerusalem for burial.

The latest attacks come amid an uptick in Israeli-Palestinian violence across the West Bank and in east Jerusalem. Earlier this month, an ultra-Orthodox Jew was left seriously injured after being stabbed by a Palestinian attacker outside the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. A week before, a Hamas militant opened fire in the Old City, killing an Israeli man. Both attackers were killed by Israeli forces.

Settler violence against Palestinians has seen a similar uptick during the olive harvest. □

# 2,500 Myanmar villagers flee army troops into Thailand



Myanmar villagers rest in an evacuation area after fleeing to Thailand following clashes between Myanmar troops and an ethnic Karen rebel group Friday, Dec. 17, 2021, in Mae Tao, Tak province, northern Thailand.

Associated Press

By BUSABA SIVASOMBOON  
Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Fighting between Myanmar government forces and ethnic guerrillas has sent about 2,500 villagers fleeing across the border into Thailand, a Thai army officer said Friday.

The exodus was the biggest since April, when several thousand villagers from Myanmar's eastern state of Karen fled to Thailand following airstrikes by Myanmar government forces in territory held by the Karen ethnic minority. They were allowed to stay for a few

days then returned to Myanmar.

The Karen are one of several ethnic minorities who have been battling for decades for greater autonomy from Myanmar's central government. Fighting between the two sides is intermittent, but heated up after the military in February seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A Thai army officer in the western border province of Tak told The Associated Press that around 2,500 villagers from Myanmar had crossed the Moei River, which marks the border, since Thursday to seek shelter in Thailand's Mae Sot district.

The officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to release information, said Thai authorities provided the evacuees -- mostly

women and children -- with humanitarian assistance including shelter and food, and tested them for COVID-19.

The Thai army task force responsible for border security issued a warning Thursday through the joint Thai-Myanmar Border Committee that it was prepared to retaliate if stray artillery shells landed on Thai soil. At least one shell landed Thursday on a Thai sugarcane plantation, causing a small fire.

The fighting earlier this year tailed off when the rainy season started, but with the rains mostly over, is expected to resume, not only in Karen territory but also in areas controlled by other ethnic rebel groups.

This week's clashes were triggered by a raid on Tuesday by government soldiers on the town of Lay Kay Kaw, which is in territory un-

der the de facto control of the Karen National Union, or KNU, the civil authority for the area.

Independent Myanmar media reported government troops seized 30-60 people associated with the organized opposition to the military government, including at least one elected lawmaker from of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. The KNU has allowed opponents of the military-installed government to take refuge in its territory.

The Karen, along with other ethnic minority groups, have a loose alliance with the army's foes, who have established a self-styled alternative administration, the National Unity Government, and its armed wing, the People's Defense Force, which is a conglomeration of lightly armed local self-defense groups. □



# Over Ethiopia's objections, UN rights body backs war monitor

**Associated Press**

**GENEVA (AP)** — Over Ethiopia's objections, the U.N.'s main human rights body voted Friday to create an international team of experts to boost scrutiny of rights abuses in the devastating yearlong war between Ethiopian government forces and fighters from the country's Tigray region.

Ethiopia's government decried a "neocolonialist mentality" after the European Union and other Western countries sought a special session of the Human Rights Council to ratchet up attention on the conflict that has left tens of thousands dead.

A resolution that won the council's approval on a 21-15 vote with 11 countries abstaining creates a three-person team with a one-year mandate to monitor and report on rights abuses in Ethiopia.

The push from EU and other Western countries demonstrates their frustration that a joint investigation between Ethiopia's human rights commission and the U.N. human rights office, which culminated with a report last month, didn't go far enough.

"The conflict has continued with ongoing fighting beyond the borders of Tigray. Our office continues to receive credible reports of severe human rights violations and abuses by all parties," the U.N. deputy high commissioner for human rights, Nada al-Nashif, told representatives at Friday's session. "The humanitarian impact of the conflict is increasingly dramatic."

Nearly 10 million people in northern Ethiopia face acute food insecurity, and at least 2 million have been forced to flee their homes. Humanitarian workers have little access and face hostility. Ethiopia's government has sought to restrict reporting on the war and detained some journalists, including a video freelancer accredited to The Associated Press, Amir Aman Kiyaro. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people swept up under Ethiopia's new state of



**Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivers her statement, during the Human Rights Council special session on "the grave human rights situation in Ethiopia", at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, Dec. 17, 2021.**

**Associated Press**

emergency remain detained, most of them Tigrayans, al-Nashif said: "Many are detained incommunicado or in unknown locations. This is tantamount to enforced disappearance, and a matter of very grave alarm."

The government-created Ethiopian Human Rights Commission acknowledged in a statement this week that there was "value-added" in encouraging the joint investigation to continue, but said creation of a new body "is repetitive, counterproductive to ongoing implementation processes, and further delays redress for victims and survivors."

Ethiopia's ambassador in Geneva, Zenebe Kebede Korcho, said his government rejects the draft resolution the Human Rights Council is considering. At Friday's session, he called the resolution a "deliberate destabilization effort" and said the government "will not cooperate with any mechanism imposed on it." The Africa group of nations at the council backed his position in a separate statement.

"Multilateralism, after all

these years, is once again being hijacked by a neocolonialist mentality. Ethiopia is being targeted and singled out at the Human Rights Council for defending a democratically elected government," the ambassador said. "The council is being used as an instrument of political pressure."

The Ethiopian ambassador said Ethiopia's government had set up an "inter-ministerial task force" in response to the human rights report issued last month, and it has begun work.

The joint report decried the "terrible toll on civilians" in the conflict in the Tigray region, and human rights violations and abuses committed by all sides. The rare collaboration by the U.N. human rights office with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was hampered by authorities' intimidation and restrictions, and didn't visit some of the war's worst-affected locations.

The U.N. human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, has said all sides in the war in the Tigray region have committed brutal abuses that could amount to war crimes and crimes against

humanity.

The investigation broke little new ground and confirmed in general the abuses described by witnesses throughout the war. But it

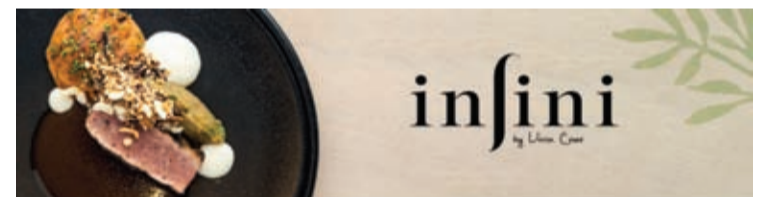
gave little sense of scale, saying for example that the more than 1,300 rapes reported to authorities were likely far fewer than the real number.

The government has insisted the report cleared it of allegations that genocide was happening in Tigray.

The conflict erupted in November 2020 after a political falling-out between the Tigray forces that long dominated the national government and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's current government. Ethnic Tigrayans across the country have reported being targeted with arbitrary detentions, while civilians in Tigray have described gang rapes, human-caused famine and mass expulsions.

The Tigray forces now face a growing number of allegations of abuses after taking the fighting into Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara and Afar regions in recent months. The joint investigation didn't examine that period.

For a special council session to take place, the support of one-third of its 47 member states is required. □



Taste limitless possibilities at Infiniti, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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## Christmas Entertainment at Paseo Herencia



**ORANJESTAD –** Paseo Herencia continues with their Holiday season celebration with lots of entertainment and specials at the stores, restaurants, and cinema.

Get in the Holiday spirit this Friday, December 17th in the Paseo plaza with Santa and his elves at 7PM and take those beautiful picture moments to share back home. Catch the nightly Christmas Themed Water Show at 7:30pm followed by a local Christmas band performance by Las Unicas at 9PM on stage.

The entertainment continues Saturday, December 18th with Las Unicas at 8PM. While strolling through the mall try one of the pop-



ular restaurants while enjoying the cozy Christmas ambiance or catch a movie at the Caribbean Cinemas in VIP reclining leather seats with the latest in laser projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound.

On Sunday, December 19th, there will be a special edition of Santa vs The Grinch at 7PM you don't want to miss followed by the violin show by Angela Flores on stage with Christmas songs at 8PM.

Every night is shopping night till 10 PM where you can shop for Christmas presents with family in a great ambiance. For more information visit Paseo Herencia's Facebook page or call (297) 586 6533. □

*Paseo Herencia*

to you this *Christmas* season

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Las Unicas  
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Fri, Dec 17 at 9pm              Dec 17 | 19 | 21 | 23

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## Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience!



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Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC.

Covid Test Center @ Paseo is conveniently located at the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment needed here.

The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as we are aware it is imperative that this shows

accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so.

We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through clear given instructions we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us.

Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox.

A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.).

For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. ☐





# Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa celebrates its 55th Anniversary



**EAGLE BEACH** — During a festive reception at the resort's beach pavilion Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa celebrated its 55th Anniversary on December 16, 2021, together with the resort's team members, Aruba's Prime Minister Mrs. Evelyn Wever-Croes and the Minister of Tourism and Health, Mr. Danguillaume Oduber and special invitees.

"Manchebo Beach Resort was originally envisioned by two KLM pilots in the mid 60's and officially opened its doors on December 16, 1966, for guests to enjoy magnificent Eagle Beach. Legendary tourism pioneers Ike & Grete Cohen had been at the helm for many years and today the resort is a successful 4-star boutique resort with a strong wellness and culinary offering for its guests" says Edgar Roelofs, the resort's general manager.

Manchebo's new owners who acquired the resort on November 15, 2021, joined the festivities as well. "Our family is very proud to be the new owner of this iconic resort on Eagle Beach and we look forward to continue the Manchebo legacy for years to come. Congratulations to the Manchebo team for providing such wonderful vacation experiences to Aruba's visitors" says Mr. Lukasz Slominski.

Part of the celebration was the recogni-

tion by the Minister of Tourism & Health, Mr. Danguillaume Oduber for "30 Years of Service in Aruba's Tourism Industry". Words of appreciation and a plaque were extended to team members of both Red Sail Sports and Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa for their dedication to tourism and the success of the island. "The resort owes much to its loyal staff, who are very much hospitality minded and made Manchebo what it is today" says Mr. Ton Kolman, the resort's managing director.

Also, on December 16 the resort's newly built Lobby Store, operated by Red Sail Sports was officially opened with the assistance of the Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism together with new tenants Peter and Marian de Hoop. "We are really pleased with our new tenant, who designed a beautiful Red Sail Boutique right in line with the resort's intimate boutique ambiance" says Mr. Roelofs.

Located on Aruba's widest stretch of Eagle Beach, Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa is an intimate 4-star luxury boutique resort featuring 72 deluxe rooms for romantic and rejuvenating getaways, a Caribbean-Balinese spa, daily yoga & Pilates classes, and a culinary offering featuring Ike's Bistro, The Chophouse, Omakase Sushi Bar and Pega-Pega Beach Grill & Bar, to compliment the vacation experience. □



## Aruba to me..... Christmas Edition



**ORANJESTAD** — You are here for Christmas or New Year and we would like to portrait you! Send a Christmas and Happy New Year greeting to your loved ones, friends or colleagues back home.

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Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: [news@arubatoday.com](mailto:news@arubatoday.com) and we will publish this between December 22nd and 31st.

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# In Your Debt: Get skills, not bills, at an unpaid internship

By SARA RATHNER of Nerd-Wallet

Every summer, students flood offices as unpaid interns, soaking up knowledge and seeking positive references as they take lunch orders and organize storage closets. But this reliance on unpaid work leaves behind students who can't afford to work for free. Between temporarily relocating to another city, buying and maintaining office-appropriate attire, and paying for everyday costs, it can cost thousands of dollars to add a few lines to your resume.

According to Carlos Mark Vera, co-founder and executive director of Pay Our Interns, a nonprofit fighting to end unpaid internships across the country in all sectors, unpaid internships disproportionately harm specific populations. Women work for no pay more often than men, and compared to white interns, Black and Latino interns take on debt more often during their internships. "It really does create this glass ceiling for people of color," Vera says. Vera, who is still paying off the credit card debt he amassed when interning at the White House seven years ago, was in-



This Aug. 11, 2019 file photo shows credit cards in New Orleans.

spired to launch Pay Our Interns after a conversation with a younger college student who was skipping buying groceries to afford dry cleaning for his internship clothes. "I think this whole grind/hustle mentality is so ingrained, that you have to pay your dues," Vera says. "It's daring to imagine how things could be." Sadly, unpaid internships are still the norm. Perhaps the Great Resignation will inspire employers to pay interns for their labor, as they should.

But until then, if an unpaid internship would help you gain experience, here are some ways to soften the financial burden and limit how much you put on your credit card to get by.

#### KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The U.S. Department of Labor has guidelines on what constitutes a legal unpaid internship — your work can't displace that of a paid employee, for example. If you suspect your internship is in violation, you can file a complaint to the Depart-

ment of Labor or your state labor agency. You may be entitled to back pay.

#### SEEK SCHOLARSHIPS AND SPECIALTY PROGRAMS

Many universities offer scholarships specifically for unpaid internships, depending on your school and major. You need to apply and funding isn't guaranteed, but the effort can pay off.

You can also find paid opportunities through specialty programs created by nonprofits and professional

organizations. For example, Black and Latino aspiring financial planners can apply through the BLX Internship Program to be placed in a paid internship at a fee-only financial planning firm. According to Luis F. Rosa, a certified financial planner and co-founder of the BLX Internship Program, they placed 38 applicants into internships last year, and of those, 20 got job offers.

#### FUND UNPAID WORK WITH PAID WORK

"I would combine an internship with other side gigs or part-time jobs," says Mark Reyes, a certified financial planner at Albert, a financial wellness app. "Depending on the internship time commitment, you may be able to balance more than one job at once." However, he cautions that this can quickly lead to burnout.

Vera felt the pressure as a student working part-time while interning 20 to 30 hours per week. "Sometimes I was fighting not to fall asleep while doing the internship," he says.

School plus two jobs is a lot to handle. To ease the burden, you can work for pay during the school year and save that money to cover the cost of a summer internship. □

Associated Press

## Regulators: threats to U.S. financial system remain elevated



Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, left, and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, appear before a Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee hearing on the CARES Act on Capitol Hill, Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021 in Washington.

Associated Press

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP  
WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's top financial regulators told Congress Friday that threats to U.S. financial stability remain elevated

even though the country has recovered from what appears to be the worst economic shocks from the pandemic.

In its annual report on

threats to the economy, the Financial Stability Oversight Council highlighted for the first time climate change as an emerging risk, citing among other things potential loan losses from floods and forest fires.

The Biden administration has made climate change a top priority, reversing the decision by the Trump administration to pull the United States out of the Paris climate agreement.

The council is chaired by Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and the heads of other regulatory agencies including the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Office of the Comptroller of the Cur-

rency.

The council was created by Congress in 2010 to address gaps in coordination among financial regulators that were exposed by the 2008 financial crisis. The council is required to issue an annual report to Congress assessing risks to the financial system.

Yellen, speaking before the panel approved the report Friday, said the turmoil that enveloped financial markets after COVID-19 hit in March 2020 had been dealt with quickly by the Federal Reserve and other agencies. She said the response showed that the "financial system is far more shock resistant" than it was when the 2008 crisis struck. While there have been improvements, Yellen said

the council still found risks to financial stability were elevated compared with the period before the pandemic.

Another emerging threat listed in the council report is cybersecurity. The council argued that more needs to be done to protect banks and other financial institutions from ransomware, malware attacks and data breaches.

The report also noted just how much remains unknown right now. Among the concerns were the now rapid-spreading omicron variant of the virus, a recent but persistent spike in inflation, and concerns that financial turmoil in China could adversely affect the U.S. and global economy. □



**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS** 40 Carnival attractions  
 1 Bike part  
 5 Center  
 10 Signs messages  
 12 Bugs 42 Netlike fabric bugs him  
 13 Digging tool  
 14 Heat home  
 15 New England catch  
 16 Print units  
 18 Nada  
 19 Singer Franklin  
 21 Clutter  
 22 Arboreal amphibians  
 24 "Boys Town" star  
 25 Sponges  
 29 Honey bunch  
 30 Fly, e.g.  
 32 Outdated  
 33 Stock holder  
 34 Train unit  
 35 Usher's place  
 37 Tara family name  
 39 Prying person

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S	E	E	D	Y	H	E	E	D	S

**Yesterday's answer**

- DOWN**  
 1 Puccini opera  
 2 Gravity of "Black Swan"  
 3 Book lover  
 4 Conclude  
 5 Dress lines  
 6 Yale roofer  
 7 In awe  
 8 Negligent  
 9 Stumbles  
 11 "Now you listen!"  
 17 Portman  
 20 Heads of France  
 21 Yucatan natives  
 23 Alito's predecessor  
 25 Stealthy  
 26 Fenway team  
 27 Century division  
 28 Alarms  
 29 Be immodest  
 31 Refuse  
 33 Livens (up)  
 36 Auction buy  
 38 That fellow

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12-18

A X Y D L B A A X R  
 is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

**12-18 CRYPTOQUOTE**

J L N K M O E M S O J K R E Q K V A N R

S O Y J K M O N Q E R M G J V V M . S K R

S O Y J K M O N Q E R M Y J T O M .

Z K M M E J A M J B E A C  
 Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I ONCE WANTED TO BECOME AN ATHEIST. BUT I GAVE UP — THEY HAVE NO HOLIDAYS. — HENNY YOUNGMAN



Vince Patton, a new Tesla owner, demonstrates on Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021, on a closed course in Portland, Ore., how he can play video games on the vehicle's console while driving. Patton, of Portland, Ore., filed a complaint with federal regulators after discovering the feature in his new car.

Associated Press

## Drivers playing video games? U.S. is looking into Tesla case

By TOM KRISHER  
 AP Auto Writer

**DETROIT (AP)**—Last August, Vince Patton was watching a YouTube video of a Tesla owner who had made a startling observation: Tesla drivers could now play a video game on their car's touch-screen dashboard while the vehicle is moving. Curious to see for himself, Patton drove his own 2021 Tesla Model 3 to an empty community college parking lot, activated a game called "Sky Force Reloaded" from a menu and did a few loops.

"I was just dumbfounded that, yes, sure enough, this sophisticated video game came up," said Patton, a 59-year-old retired broadcast journalist who lives near Portland, Oregon. He tried Solitaire, too, and was able to activate that

game while driving. Later, he found he could browse the internet while his car was moving.

Patton, who loves his car and says he has nothing against Tesla, worries that drivers will play games and become dangerously distracted. "Somebody's going to get killed," he said. "It's absolutely insane." Which is why early last month, Patton decided to file a complaint with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the government's road safety agency.

"NHTSA needs to prohibit all live video in the front seat and all live interactive web browsing while the car is in motion," Patton wrote in his complaint. "Creating a dangerous distraction for the driver is recklessly negligent."

On Wednesday, NHTSA confirmed that it's looking into the matter. News of Patton's complaint was first reported Tuesday by The New York Times.

"We are aware of driver concerns and are discussing the feature with the manufacturer," a NHTSA spokeswoman wrote in an email. "The Vehicle Safety Act prohibits manufacturers from selling vehicles with design defects posing unreasonable risks to safety."

The spokeswoman declined to provide further details of its conversations with Tesla. The agency has not opened a formal investigation, which would involve requests for documents and other detailed information.

Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department, did not respond to messages from The Associated Press.

NHTSA's inquiry marks the latest in a growing list of possible infractions involving advanced auto technology that are being reviewed by two federal agencies as potential safety risks. □

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# Melania Trump announces NFT venture



First Lady Melania Trump listens as President Donald Trump speaks with reporters as he walks to board Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

**MATT OTT**  
AP Business Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — In exchange for a cryptocurrency token, you can own a digital watercolor painting of Melania Trump's eyes. The former first lady launched a venture this week selling NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, on her website in exchange for a Solan token, currently valued around \$180 each. Melania Trump will release NFTs "in regular intervals" on her website, according to a news release, with a portion of the proceeds going to foster children. It's unclear what percentage of the proceeds will be donated, or whether the donations will be given to specific foster child-related charities. An email inquiry about how the donations would be structured were not answered by Melania Trump's press contact. Aaron Dorfman, president and CEO of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, says when a company says "a portion of the proceeds" will go to charity without indicating specifically what amount, "It's a huge red flag." "It means that charity is not a serious part of their plan," Dorfman said. "It's a marketing ploy." The Trump family has a troubled history with charities, though Melania Trump was not directly involved in a clash over a charity the

family ran in New York. While still president, Donald Trump paid a \$2 million court-ordered fine after conceding he used his charitable foundation as a personal piggy bank. The fine was ordered to be distributed amongst eight charities. The Trump Foundation was dissolved. In addition, Trump agreed to restrictions if he were to form a new charity or foundation and New York State required mandatory training for his children, Donald Trump Jr., Ivanka Trump, and Eric Trump, who were all involved with the Trump Foundation. Non-fungible tokens are essentially digital certificates

of authenticity that can be attached to art, music or any other type of digital file. NFTs confirm an item's ownership by recording the details on a digital ledger known as a blockchain, which is public and stored on computers across the internet, making it effectively impossible to lose or destroy. An NFT by the digital artist who goes by Beeple sold for nearly \$70 million earlier this year. It sparked huge interest in the digital technology that has been around for several years, piggy-backing on a Bitcoin craze that made blockchain a household word. Digital cat characters were selling for six-figure sums as

far back as 2017 and today you can buy digital LeBron James basketball highlight NFTs for anywhere from a couple bucks to nearly a quarter of a million dollars. While often pitched as a fun hobby like collectibles because their values fluctuate, many treat NFTs as an investment. Like cryptocurrency, they are largely unregulated and many experts warn against putting money into them. □

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# Review: Maggie Gyllenhaal's 'Lost Daughter' is a stunner

By **JOCELYN NOVECK**  
AP National Writer

Motherhood. It's such a rich subject for art to ponder, you'd think we'd have already seen every kind of mother onscreen.

But actually we haven't. Sure, we've seen good moms, bad moms, crazy moms, selfish moms, generous moms, loving moms, cold moms. But what strikes home so vividly in "The Lost Daughter," Maggie Gyllenhaal's gorgeous directorial debut, is how rarely we see a mother who is all those things at once. And yet honestly, what could be more real than that?

On my first viewing of Gyllenhaal's film, adapted from an Elena Ferrante novel, I was preoccupied with Olivia Colman in yet another blazing performance (is there anything Colman can't do?), a veritable onion shedding layers as she plays Leda, a prickly yet exceedingly vulnerable 48-year-old academic.

But there's another facet to this film that makes it a rarity. On second viewing, what transfixed me was the synergy between older Leda and younger Leda, played by Jessie Buckley as a mother on the cusp of 30. Gyllenhaal interweaves their stories with a deft touch that deepens the connection as the film progresses, to the point where nary a doubt remains that they're



This image released by Netflix shows Olivia Colman in a scene from "The Lost Daughter." Associated Press

the same person. Do they look alike? Outwardly no, I guess, but there's an inner connection that's astonishing (the two actors never meet, of course). The casting choice — it was Colman who suggested Buckley — is simply inspired.

We meet Colman's Leda as she arrives on an idyllic Greek island for a "working holiday," laden with books. A British professor of comparative literature who teaches "in Cambridge, near Boston" (wink wink), Colman's Leda settles into a rental apartment a short walk through the woods to the sea. She seems content — triumphant, even — the next day as she nestles in

her beach chair with an ice cream cone and her notebooks.

Then the family arrives — a boisterous extended clan from Queens in New York, who noisily disturb her peaceful isolation, even asking her to move to another part of the beach (she says no.) But Leda is fascinated by the quiet one, Nina, a beautiful young mother (Dakota Johnson) whose domineering husband spends weekdays off the island. She can't seem to keep her eyes off Nina and the young daughter, who demands her exhausted mom's constant attention. In fact, Leda immediately starts to cry.

When, one day, the little girl goes missing for a bit, it's Leda who manages to find her, earning gratitude from the frantic Nina. But the youngster has lost her prized doll, and she's inconsolable for days on end.

Meanwhile, the onion is peeling — we're learning more about Leda, a mother of two adult daughters. As she gradually reveals details to Will (Paul Mescal), the strapping young Irishman who works at the beach house, or to Lyle (Ed Harris), the American caretaker of her apartment, or to Nina, Gyllenhaal toggles these scenes with those from decades earlier, when Leda — now Buckley

— was a young mom balancing work with parenting. Although her husband, also an academic, clearly loves the girls, it's his work — as in so many families — that takes precedence at tough moments.

The scenes with Buckley (as splendid as Colman) and her daughters are heartbreaking, especially to any mother who's tried unsuccessfully to find the balance between children and the work that makes her whole. Her Leda can go from deeply loving — collapsing to the floor in giggles with her girls — to terribly cruel, as when she (excruciatingly!) refuses to kiss the cut finger of her crying daughter. And yet she's so passionate — about life, and about work — that we can't help but sympathize with her. Then there's Nina (an excellent Johnson doing some of her best work to date), whose troubled motherhood becomes a mirror for older Leda. Colman's most dramatic moments, which combine an aching vulnerability with a distasteful brittleness, come in two scenes with Johnson. In one, Leda makes a heart-shattering confession about her past. In the other, she cops to an inexplicable transgression in the present. With lead performances like these, it's easy to forget the noteworthy work in supporting roles. □

## 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' snags eye-popping \$50M in previews

By **JAKE COYLE**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — For the first time since the pandemic began, the box office is booming. "Spider-Man: No Way Home" grossed \$50 million in Thursday previews alone, a stunning start for a movie set to break pandemic records.

Sony Pictures' "No Way Home" scored the third-largest preview total ever, trailing only those for "Avengers: Endgame" (\$60 million) and "The Force Awakens" (\$57 million). Previews once featured only late-night screenings,

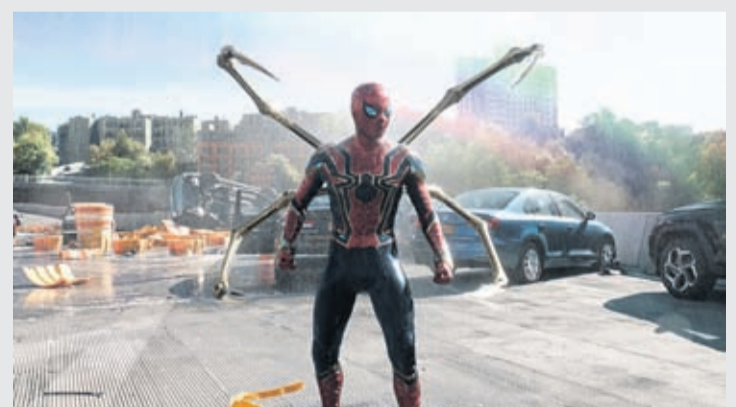
but they have steadily moved earlier in the day; "No Way Home" began playing around 3 p.m. in 3,767 locations.

But there was no exaggerating the eye-popping total for the Marvel release, starring Tom Holland. "No Way Home" is on pace to be the first release of the pandemic to surpass \$100 million. It could go as high as \$150 million. The previous best of this year was also a Marvel-Sony release, "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," which launched with \$90.1 million.

"Spider-Man: No Way

Home" is managing to pack theaters even as the spreading omicron variant is forcing closures in the entertainment industry, including numerous Broadway shows. As recently as last week, when Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" opened softly, the box office had been fitfully sputtering back to life.

But while some moviegoers, particularly older ticket-buyers, have been more reluctant, the younger, devoted Marvel fanbase has proven resistant to the pandemic challenges of moviegoing. With "No Way



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Tom Holland in Columbia Pictures' "Spider-Man: No Way Home." Associated Press

Home," Marvel releases will make up five of the top six films of the year, including "Shang-Chi and the

Legend of the Ten Rings," "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," "Black Widow" and "Eternals." □



# Column: Meyer learns bullies run out of rope fast in NFL

By **JIM LITKE**  
AP Sports Columnist

There's a dozen good reasons why college coaches rarely make a successful jump to the NFL. Leave it to Urban Meyer to trip over the dumbest one.

After 13 games packed with more missteps than a Master P appearance on "Dancing With the Stars," Meyer was still treating grown men like kids, still behaving like he was the king on a campus somewhere. Still sloganeering, blustering at some and blaming everybody else at the drop of a pass. But there's a reason bullies run out of rope a lot faster in the pros. It's because the guys holding onto the other end have contracts, too.

In that sense, Meyer's firing hardly qualifies as a surprise. And it hardly matters whether the final straw was the report in a Florida newspaper about Meyer kicking a former kicker in disgust back in training camp last August. Jaguars owner Shad Khan had so many gaffes to choose from that the statement he released Thursday — "an immediate change is imperative for everyone" — could have been written shortly after his coach got caught grinding in a bar in late September. Or anytime last month, when Meyer's offense was



Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Urban Meyer walks off the field after a loss to the Los Angeles Rams during an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 5, 2021, in Inglewood, Calif.

Associated Press

wheeling out an average of less than 10 points a game en route to losing five in a row. Or just this past Monday, for that matter, when a reporter asked Meyer whether safety Andre Cisco would get more playing time. "Cisco is playing a little bit more, I believe," he said. "I don't have his numbers in front of me." Since Meyer hadn't bothered to look, here they are: Cisco recorded exactly zero plays on defense in an embarrassing 20-0 loss at Tennessee a day earlier. Rather than mull over why

Meyer's NFL tenure was the fastest flameout since that other paragon of virtue, Bobby Petrino, walked out on the Falcons in 2007, here's a better question: How was Meyer so successful for so long in the college game pulling a lot of the same shenanigans?

We know he was slapping motivational signs all over Jaguars' facility, as he had at all his other stops, because his former players tore them down shortly after news of Meyer's firing reached the place. We know he arguing with

players and berating his assistants as "losers" in Jacksonville, because those happened out in the open. What's the chance the 57-year-old Meyer only developed those nasty habits late in life?

Now, to be fair, someone who wins three national championships and builds success at every school he's coached doesn't lack for talent or brains. Early on in his career, the 57-year-old Meyer displayed plenty of both, and his recruiting skills throughout took a backseat perhaps only to

the devil himself.

At Bowling Green (2001-02) and Utah (2003-04), Meyer was a pioneer and loud advocate for the spread offense that opened up the college game and caught on with a few of his influential NFL brethren (think Chiefs coach Andy Reid). To Florida (2005-10), he brought intensity and an attention to detail that few of his college counterparts could match. At Ohio State (2012-18), he became more a CEO than a coach, letting assistants handle most of the on-field scheming while he made sure the program's advantages — more money, bigger staffs and better facilities — continued to pull in the best recruits. Winning, though, wasn't the only thing that marked Meyer's college years. Those last two stops produced national championships, but way too much drama. At Florida, 31 of his players were arrested during his five years there. At Ohio State, he was put on paid administrative leave after claiming he was unaware that Buckeyes receivers coach Zach Smith, who was arrested on a domestic-abuse charge in 2009 while an assistant on Meyer's Florida staff, was alleged to have committed the same abuse again in 2015. □

# Winnipeg coach Maurice resigns, Lowry gets interim job

**WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP)** — Winnipeg Jets coach Paul Maurice has resigned, saying his longtime team needs to hear a "new voice."

The Jets announced Maurice's decision on Friday, and said it was effective immediately. Dave Lowry, an assistant under Maurice, agreed to serve as the interim coach for the rest of the season, general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said.

Winnipeg (13-10-5) has dropped three of four heading into Friday night's game against the visiting Washington Capitals. It lost 4-2 to the lowly Buffalo Sa-

bres on Tuesday.

"This isn't necessarily a bunch of negative things that stacked up on this," Maurice said. "This was, I've pushed as long and as hard as I can here. I love these guys. They need a new voice, and I know that."

Maurice, who turns 55 on Jan. 30, coached Winnipeg into the playoffs in each of the previous four seasons. The Jets swept Edmonton in the first round in May and then were swept by Montreal in the next round.

Maurice took over as Jets coach in January 2014. He coached exactly 600 regular-season games with the franchise, going 315-223-

62.

He signed a multiyear extension with the Jets in February 2020.

"Even in the real disappointing losses, I thought we worked," Cheveldayoff said. "A lot of times you hear the terms ... 'He lost the room' and stuff like that. I really didn't think that the guys ever stopped working and I don't think they ever stopped listening. Did they stop hearing? It's semantics, but I think there is a different thing."

Maurice got his first head coaching job with the then-Hartford Whalers for the 1995-96 season. He has a career record of 775-680-



Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice, Jansen Harkins (12), Kristian Vesalainen (93) and goaltender Connor Hellebuyck (37) watch from the bench against the Buffalo Sabres during the third period of an NHL hockey game, Tuesday, Dec. 14, 2021 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Associated Press

99-130, spending two stints with the Carolina franchise

and also coaching the Toronto Maple Leafs. □



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